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Suspect on Trial in Rome May Aid Turkish Inquiry

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ANKARA, Turkey — Officials here say they believe the return to this country of a Turk suspected of being a racketeer may cast further light on the operations of international smuggling rings that, the Turkish officials say, use Bulgaria as a base.

The smuggling rings are believed to be involved in shipping narcotics to Western countries and shipping arms and munitions to extremist organizations in Turkey and the Middle East.

The Turkish suspect, Bekir Celenk, is being tried in absentia in Rome. The other defendants are three Bulgarians and four other Turks, including Mehmet Ali Agca, the convicted assailant of Pope John Paul II. All eight are accused of conspiring to kill the Pope, and Mr. Agca is the star prosecution witness. The implication of the prosecution's case been that the Soviet Union, through the Bulgarian secret service, was involved in hatching the purported plot to kill the Pope.

Mr. Celenk has denied any involvement in such a plot, as have all of the others except Mr. Agca.

Mr. Agca has asserted that Mr. Celenk acted as intermediary for a Soviet diplomat and offered Mr. Agca \$1.2 million to assassinate the Pope. But Turkish investigators and justice officials in European countries said they had no evidence directly linking Mr. Celenk with Mr. Agca.

Indirect Evidence at Best

The evidence tying Mr. Celenk to gun and drug rings to which Mr. Agca and some of his accomplices also belonged is at best indirect or circumstantial, investigators said.

Turkish officials interviewed recently said Mr. Celenk might face hearings in Turkey on his purported role in the shooting of the Pope. They said their own charges against him involved allegations by investigators in several countries, including Turkey, Italy and the United States, that he was a central figure in an international drug and arms ring that was broken in the late 1970's.

In December 1982, an Italian investigating magistrate, Carlo Palermo, issued an arrest order for Mr. Celenk, accusing him of involvement in a major international drugs-for-arms smuggling ring that purportedly shipped Middle Eastern opium and heroin to the West in exchange for arms to be shipped to Turkey and the Middle East.

Judge Palermo and Turkish officials assisting him have accused Bulgaria of offering the smugglers considerable logistical aid, including the use of warehouses and shipping outlets, through the Bulgarian state-owned trading and shipping company, Kintex.

The ring shipped about two and a half tons of raw opium and heroin from Iran for sale in the West, investigators say. They said the profits were reinvested in arms and munitions that were then delivered to extremist groups in Turkey, Lebanon, Iran and other Middle Eastern countries.

Convictions by Swiss Court

In May, a court in Basel, Switzerland, convicted three Turks, including Mehmet Sener, a close associate of Mr. Agca, on drug-trafficking charges. Though Swiss officials said they had strong evidence that the drug ring included Abdullah Catli and Oral Celik, who are former associates of Mr. Agca, they said they had no evidence directly linking these men with Mr. Celenk.

The arrests and investigations have produced findings that could lend credence to two competing views of the purported conspiracy to kill the Pope.

On the one hand, the investigations have found strong links between drug and arms rings and Bulgarian Government agencies. This supports the basic contention of the prosecution in the Rome trial that Mr. Celenk was the go-between who linked Soviet bloc intelligence services and Mr. Agca.

But the investigations have also found a close-knit group of right-wing Turkish nationalists, of which Mr. Agca says he was once a member, if not its leader. This group seeks to wrest Turkey and its largely Moslem population from what it perceives to be undue Western and Christian influence.

Although Mr. Agca has asserted that associates who include Mr. Celik, one of the five Turkish defendants in the Rome trial, received the equivalent of \$1.2 million for the shooting of the Pope, officials say this group operates without evident Bulgarian support. They also say its members, most of them fugitives, rely on the help of right-wing Turks in Western Europe to escape arrest.

Mr. Celenk, 50, was under house ar-

rest in Bulgaria until July 7, when Bulgarian officials unexpectedly sent him home to Turkey, saying they lacked proof he was involved in a conspiracy against the Pope.

Arrest in Turkey

Five days after his release, Mr. Celenk was formally arrested by the Turkish authorities. Drug enforcement officials in Ankara said most of the charges were linked to investigations by the Italian magistrate, Judge Palermo, who twice sought the extradition of Mr. Celenk from Bulgaria on charges of smuggling drugs and arms.

Mr. Celenk, who traveled throughout Western and Eastern Europe after leaving Turkey in 1980, settled in Switzerland in 1980, setting up a small watch trading company called Ovaras S.A. in the Swiss watchmaking center of Biel.

Swiss drug investigators in Basel said that the police began linking Mr. Celenk's name with drug trafficking in the early 1980's and that they later suspected him of using Ovaras and its Swiss bank accounts to hide drug profits.

Seref Benli, one of the men convicted in Basel with Mr. Sener, is a currency-exchange dealer who Swiss officials suspect offered his services to associates of Mr. Celenk, who remained in Switzerland to look after his business interests.

Moreover, Nevzat Bilecen, a Turk who was the prosecution's chief witness in the trial against Mr. Sener, described to Swiss investigators how he accompanied Oral Celik on trips throughout Switzerland to deliver goods, like forged passports, to Turkish racketeers with ties to the smuggling rings operating out of Bulgaria.